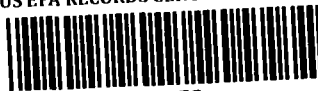


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THE NEW YORK TIMES

Hazardous Wastes Detected in Wells Near St. Paul

Special to The New York Times

OAKDALE, Minn., Oct. 25 — The Minnesota Health Department is testing drinking water in this St. Paul suburb after preliminary findings earlier this week showed traces of benzene, isopropyl ether and toluene in municipal and privately owned wells.

As a precaution, two of the city's five wells and four private wells have been closed because they showed traces of the contaminants, all of the which are suspected of causing cancer. One of those city wells is within 100 yards of a chemi-

cal waste disposal site that may be responsible for the presence of the contaminants.

The Health Department has also taken water samples from wells in three other surrounding suburbs, Woodbury, North St. Paul and Lake Elmo, to determine whether they might have been contaminated by the disposal site. Gary Englund, a department engineer, said the test results might not be known for two weeks.

So far, no illnesses or deaths have been linked to the water supplies in any of the four communities, and the Health De-

partment has issued no warnings to residents not to use the water.

But some are taking no chances. Sales of bottled water at groceries were reportedly brisk, particularly in Oakdale.

A spokesman for the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency said the chemicals were believed to have seeped into the ground water from a disposal site operated by the Abresch Barrel and Drum Company. The 160-acre landfill in the middle of Oakdale was used for the disposal of chemical wastes from 1951 until it was closed in 1961.

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Because of shoddy record keeping, the spokesman said, it is not known what chemicals were dumped at the site. Nor have the authorities been able to identify all the companies that paid to dispose of wastes there.

The 3-M Company, however, says it hired private contractors to haul chemical waste from its St. Paul facility to the Abresch landfill.

A spokesman for the company said that the waste included 55-gallon drums and 5-gallon pails believed to be filled with waste solvents. The spokesman said 3-M was unsure what solvents were in those containers but believed that they included mineral spirits, acetone, methyl ethyl, ketone and toluene.

None of those chemicals were considered to be hazardous when they were buried at the landfill, the spokesman said. But Mr. Englund, the Health Department engineer, said that benzene, the chemical detected in the preliminary tests earlier this week, was a base for most solvents.

The state pollution control agency spokesman said four other companies had been suspected of dumping wastes at the Abresch site. The spokesman refused, however, to identify those firms until the completion of the agency's investigation.

Craig Mattson, the Oakdale Administrator, said that the landfill had been inspected several times in the last few years after complaints by residents. "But

those inspections showed no reason to be concerned," Mr. Mattson said.

It was not until Oct. 8, he said, that the city was notified by the pollution control agency that the landfill might be dangerous and that further tests were to be done.

The pollution control agency said the potential danger was not discovered until the agency was able to question a brother of a former landfill owner and an employee for a company contracted to haul chemical wastes to the site. The agency then ordered the preliminary tests based on testimony by both men as to what chemicals had been buried at the landfill.

If the water is contaminated, there apparently is little that can be done now. "Any damage that can be done has been done," Mr. Mattson said.